

FRIGHTENING FRIGHTENING



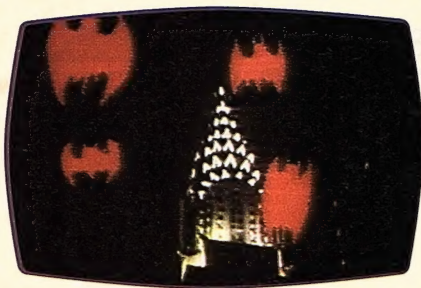
From the cheesy to the queasy—camcorder special effects for your Halloween home movies



BY GLENN KENNY

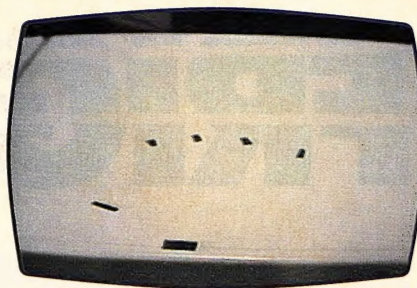
VR Senior Editor

The season for goblins, ghouls and ghosts is practically upon us, and whether you're recording the kids in their trick-or-treating costumes, documenting an epic apple-bobbing contest or mounting your own eerie horror epic, a simple combination of camcorder magic and imagination can bring the family together for some video fun. The first three effects in this article are simple enough to do with your kids. Try the last one with teens, who don't scare as easily.



◀ GOING BATTY

We've always been fond of the those William Castle horror flicks—*13 Ghosts*, *The House on Haunted Hill*, *The Tingler* and others. Even more enjoyable than their ridiculous plots were their corny effects. Half the fun of *13 Ghosts* was looking for the strings that operated the bats and skeletons. It's in this tradition that we concocted the "superimposed bat" effect. It's a cinch to do with your kids, giving them a chance to see their "artwork" interact with video action. You'll need a camcorder with a digital superimposer—the more pages the better. Then, on sheets of oaktag, have your kids draw silhouettes of bats. In each picture, the bats come farther down on the sheet, and closer together. Store the picture from each sheet on a page of the superimposer. Then, place an appropriate subject in the middle of the video frame (we used the Chrysler Building—but an unruly child will do). By calling up the first page, and then the next three in rapid succession, you'll create a funny, if rudimentary, animated effect.

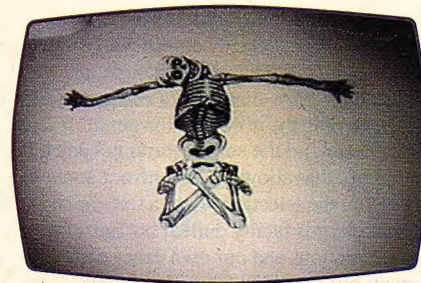
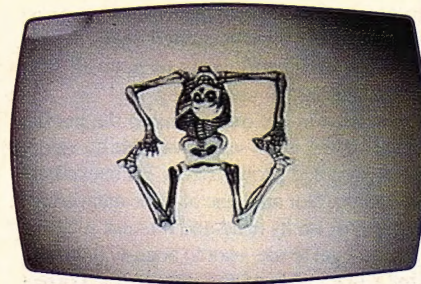
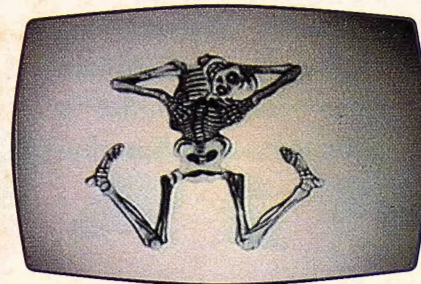
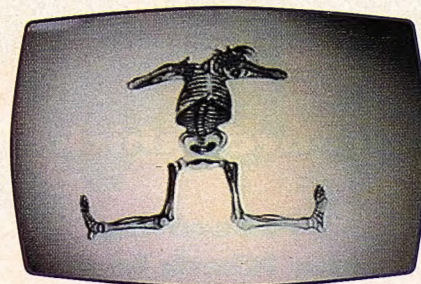
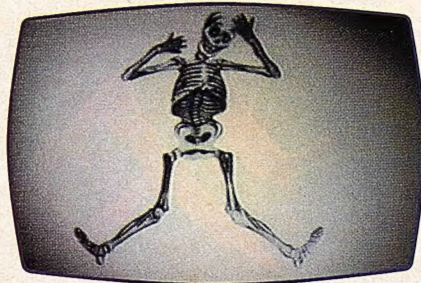
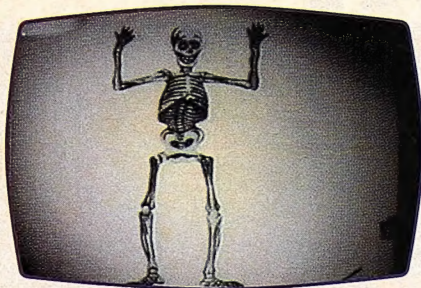


ARACHNOPHOBIA ▶

This summer's boxoffice hit gave spiders a big comeback. An animation feature on your camcorder and a trip to the novelty store can help you create your own eight-legged nightmare. We used oodles of tiny plastic spiders and had them swarm over our unsuspecting model's hand, leaving only a bony reminder of what was.

This requires less preparation than you might expect. First, determine the position of the hand on the table. A good way to keep things consistent is to use colored tape to mark the places on the table where the tips of the fingers and the bottom of the palm will be resting. Start the spiders out in formation, "crawling" toward the hand an eighth-inch each animation interval. Once the spiders are on the hand, keep them there with spirit gum, a mild, skin-friendly adhesive you can find in professional makeup stores.

For an extra thrill (not shown), once the hand is completely covered with the horrible creatures, replace it with the similarly doctored skeleton hand (available from novelty stores) and reverse the process, having the sated beasts scurrying away.



◀ SKELETON DANCE

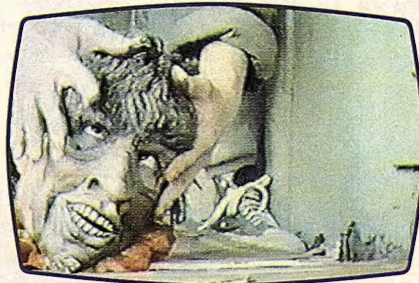
From Walt Disney's *Silly Symphonies* to Abbott and Costello to the Three Stooges, the dancing skeleton is a staple of the cinema. With the animation feature of your camcorder, you can make an inexpensive cardboard skeleton emulate this silver-screen icon. Because a five-and-dime cardboard skeleton has movable arms and legs, you can arrange them at right angles at every animation interval to create a hysterical, herky-jerky effect. Just mount or hang the skeleton against a flat surface (preferably with a black backdrop) and go. For more amusement, try the effect with three of them, and create a Moulin Rouge chorus line of dancing skeletons, with their right and left legs kicking in unison.

GETTING A HEAD ▶

For our last effect, we chose one created by a couple of our readers, horror-maven brothers Blake and Brett Cousins, for our Great *VIDEO REVIEW* Shootoff. In their innovative and gory entry *Slaughter Day III*, they gave us this *Re-Animator*-inspired moment.

The killer, having been hacked to pieces by the heroes, literally puts himself back together, twisting on his head last. As you might imagine, it takes at least two people to pull off this effect, but the wonder of it is more in the editing than the shooting.

First, one of the actors scrunched himself up in an oversized jacket, head concealed within. For the gory area around the neck, the brothers used couch stuffing soaked in fake blood (cotton and food dye will do). Another actor put on the dummy mask and poked his head through a hole in the floor of the abandoned house where they shot the scene. The camcorder cut away just as the first actor's hands gripped the head and started lifting. (You can get around the floor-board trick by shooting a long shot of the headless, writhing body with the mask on the floor beside it—stuffed and propped to give the appearance of reality.) By keeping the long shots brief and alternating them with quick close-up shots of the mask with a real head in it (eyes always rolling, to keep the audience convinced) the Cousins brothers created a scary and funny sequence—and it cost them only about four dollars in supplies! □



CRITIC'S CHOICE

HORROR

By Richard Schickel

**Presenting
the Ninth in a
10th Anniversary
Series—America's
Leading Critics
on the World's
Greatest Movies**

To tell you the truth, I don't scare easy. (Not at the movies, anyway; life is a different matter.) Nor do I readily suspend disbelief in the heavy fantastic (the light fantastic—romance comedy, musicals, improbable adventure yarns—is also a different matter). Put it this way: Ghosts, mutants, intergalactic aliens and Beelzebub in his many manifestations exist for me only as metaphors for certain unpleasant possibilities of this world, not as realistic representations of alternative worlds. This means that many classic horror movies leave me unmoved. Or, at best, moved to contemptuous snorts and snickers.

On the other hand, I am easily disgusted. This means that though I have attended most of the more recent, and in some quarters highly esteemed, horror pictures, I can't honestly claim to have seen them in their entirety. I automatically turn away when blood and entrails are splattered all too lavishly across the screen, or when the hero's transformation into a monster is all too vividly presented, thanks to the latest in make-up and special effects.

Let me illustrate those generalities specifically: The original 1958 version of *The Fly* is not one of my favorites (too silly), and neither is David Cronenberg's 1986 remake (too nauseating).

And now let me renege on those generalities—at least partially. For I have to admit that many of my most intense movie memories are of horror movies. I am obliged to observe as well that it is a particularly hardy genre, one that (unlike westerns, musicals and

screwball comedies) has flourished in every movie era. Finally, and most importantly, I have to insist that some of the movies' most arresting and sophisticated imagery has been generated by the simple desire to scare the pants off us. Or (ahem) to put us in touch with our primal fears—which amounts to the same thing.

All of which makes me (at least in my own opinion) the perfect person for an overview of the 10 best scare sagas available on video. I am not a horror cultist revering and proselytizing for everything and anything that feeds his passion. Nor am I one of those mainstream reviewers who likes to pat horror on its head and dismiss it with a supercilious joke. Hey, it didn't get to me—not to august, judicious me. In other words, I think I'm capable of maintaining the correct stance toward this genre—that blend of skepticism and sympathy out of which a sensible appreciation of any expressive form arises.

What follows might be termed a selection of horror movies for people who don't like horror movies—or, more properly, for people who don't like to admit that they like horror movies. Its bias is toward pictures that marked turning points in the history of the genre. It also favors movies that use the bizarre and the supernatural not as ends in themselves, but as metaphors that allow us to confront some of our most basic anxieties. Finally, the selection prizes a self-satirizing spirit—not so campy that our terror is fatally dulled, but humorously aware of the movies' manipulations and our own eager complicity in the effort to scare away our quotidian cares and woes.